

This guidance note is designed to **provide information for External Examiners** regarding arrangements being made to mitigate the impact of the Middle East conflict on assessment at the Dubai Campus.

In March 2026, the University invoked *Regulation A10: Authorities in Exceptional Circumstances* (see p.5) in order to put in place arrangements to mitigate the impact on the Middle East conflict teaching and assessment at the Dubai Campus. The engagement of our External Examiners in the review of assessment and in the operation of our Boards of Examiners is a particularly critical aspect of our approach to ensuring maintenance of quality and academic standards in our Dubai-based provision. Heriot-Watt University gratefully acknowledges your invaluable contribution.

Teaching and assessment arrangements for UK and Malaysia Campuses, for academic partnerships and for online provision are continuing as originally planned (*please note local industrial action is taking place at the UK campuses in March/April 2026; External Examiners will be notified of any impact in due course*); the only adjustments have been in relation to the Dubai Campus. If the scope of your external examining does not require you to review Dubai Campus programmes, your role will be unaffected.

### **Teaching and Assessment-Related Decisions taken by Heriot-Watt University: Providing Context for External Examiners**

In response to the conflict in the Middle East, on 4 March 2026, the Senate Committee for Interim Business and Effectiveness (SCIBE), approved the enactment of Regulation A10: Authorities in Exceptional Circumstances (see Appendix). In conjunction with existing policies on academic decision-making, A10 enables the University to take steps to ensure that whole cohorts of students are not academically disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control in course assessment results, progression or final award.

#### **Teaching**

1. Due to the Ministry's directive, teaching took place wholly online in w/c 2 March and no teaching is taking place in weeks of 9 and 16 March. Teaching will resume for the remaining two weeks of semester on Monday 23 March and continue to Saturday 4 April.
2. School leadership teams have discussed and agreed how best to use the remaining two weeks, using Programme and Course Learning Outcomes to prioritise content and activities to be covered.
3. School leadership teams are developing plans for hybrid delivery in case the Dubai Campus reopens, with arrangements made for students able to return to campus, while providing support for students not returning to campus to continue their learning online. **(to be updated to hybrid or online, depending on Ministry guidance)**

#### **Assessment Arrangements**

7. Since many students have been repatriated or have returned home, in the interests of equity of experience and opportunity, there will be no in-person exams at the Dubai Campus in April/May.
8. In recognition of the staff time required to redesign teaching and assessment, for Year 1 and Year 2 students, all assessments in progress and all forthcoming assessments are cancelled (coursework and exams) and all students will be given a "P" pass grade for this semester's Level 7/8 courses (the

P Grade will also be used where Level 8 courses are being taken by Y3 students). However, Global College students will continue to use the HAPS grading system to inform articulation into degree programmes.

- Year 1 and 2 students will be given a “pass-proceed” decision to proceed to the next stage unless they have reassessments from September semester.
  - If professional bodies are not satisfied that course learning outcomes have been met and require Y1 and Y2 students to undertake an in-person exam for accreditation or exemption purposes, this will be arranged at a later date.
9. For UG Years 3-5 and Postgraduate taught provision, School leadership teams are determining alternative assessment arrangements per course:
10. Decision-making on assessment is being shaped by
- Programme and Course Learning Outcomes;
  - Maintaining quality and academic standards;
  - Ensuring no academic disadvantage;
  - Recognising that students will be undertaking assessments in different environments;
  - Ensuring the needs of students of determination are considered.
11. Options include: Final Online Assessment as a replacement for exam; continuing with coursework as planned (adjusted deadlines); adapting or cancelling coursework; using significant amount of coursework already completed as a basis for determining final mark/grade;
12. Dissertations/Projects will continue to be submitted, as planned, in view of the credit-weighting, albeit with adjustments such as extended deadlines
13. School teams are being fully supported in assessment redesign, including considerations related to academic integrity and GenAI.
14. If professional bodies are not satisfied that course or programme learning outcomes have been met, in the case of graduating students, the Award Board of Examiners should determine whether an award decision could be made for an unaccredited degree (it is recognised that this is not permitted by some PSRBs and an Ordinary Degree would have to be awarded), with students undertaking the required assessment at a later date. If professional bodies require graduating or continuing UGY3-5 or PGT students to undertake an in-person exam for accreditation or exemption purposes, this should be confirmed in writing and will be arranged at a later date.

### **Robustness of Alternative Assessment Arrangements**

15. The University has a well-defined set of regulations and policies to ensure, in exceptional circumstances, maintenance of an equitable, transparent and effective approach to decisions related to assessment, progression and award. These include [Regulation A10: Authorities in Exceptional Circumstances](#) and a range of Academic Decision-Making [Policies](#) and [Procedures](#) (including [Student Guides](#)). Additionally, the University has a policy – Exceptional Credits, EC - in place for the awarding credit for whole cohorts in instances where assessment has been significantly impacted (see section 9 of the [Policy on Discretionary Credits](#)).
16. Additionally, all academic decision-making is being planned and managed by the Academic Continuity Group, a global team of senior leaders, chaired by the Deputy Principal (Education and Student Life), to ensure actions are robust and aligned with institutional policy.

17. A robust framework remains in place for: maintaining academic standards and the value of HWU awards; retaining academic decision-making in full; assessing all learning outcomes and securing academic integrity.
18. Degree algorithms will be unaltered, ensuring that awards made are comparable with preceding years and academic standards are maintained.
19. All qualifying assessments (ie those which contribute to a final award) will continue to be moderated and reviewed by External Examiners as per the University's standard processes. The Academic Deans of the University or their representatives will continue to attend all Award Boards of Examiners to ensure equitable and transparent decision-making across Schools.
20. External Examiners and the Academic Deans of the University will have the opportunity during, or at the end of, the Board meeting to comment on such matters as: exam questions, student performance, the assessment process and schemes for marking and classification. In view of the current situation, External Examiners and the Academic Deans of the University will be invited to comment (both verbally at the Board and in writing in their reports) in particular on the Board's actions taken to mitigate the impact of the conflict.
21. University awards will not be made with fewer than the specified credits as required by both HWU Regulations and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, enabling students to demonstrate, through their transcript, that they have achieved in their award the full complement of credits and to satisfy all accrediting authorities that the quality and standards of awards remain secure.
22. Specific guidance for [Boards of Examiners](#) and tailored briefing sessions for Chairs of Boards of Examiners and Deans Reps will be provided on mitigating the impact of the conflict. Boards of Examiners will be asked to consider carefully the impact of any disruptions and to be fair and equitable in deciding on assessment results, progression decisions and degree awards. Each Board will be asked to review performance in previous years to ensure comparability.
23. The University has comprehensive sets of resources and support related to designing assessment for academic integrity and to using alternatives to exams (all on the institutional SharePoint sites). These resources have been revised to support reviewing and redesigning assessment approaches impacted by the conflict.

### **Your Role as External Examiner**

Teaching and assessment arrangements for UK and Malaysia Campuses, for academic partnerships and for online provision are continuing as originally planned (**may need amending for UK industrial action**); the only adjustments have been in relation to the Dubai Campus. If the scope of your external examining does not require you to review Dubai Campus programmes, your role will be unaffected.

### **Review of Assessment Materials and Operation of Boards of Examiners**

24. All Award Boards of Examiners will take place as planned and on the originally scheduled date. You are likely to have been already advised will be advised by the relevant School support team of dates and other arrangements, but if not, please get in touch with your School Primary Contact (**see No.32**)
25. As mentioned in No 22, guidance for [Boards of Examiners](#) and training for Chairs is being adapted to ensure due consideration of the Dubai context. The guidance will cover the information provided in points 1-23 above.
26. As an External Examiner, you will be invited to contribute to the Board of Examiners as normal and as outlined in [The Handbook on External Examining for Taught Programmes](#) . Materials for review will be uploaded to your individual External Examiner folder and student coursework submissions will

be found on the Canvas VLE. Links and access to all relevant materials and information can be found on the [Appointed External Examiners website](#).

27. You will have the opportunity during, or at the end of, the Board meeting to comment as usual on such matters as: exam questions, student performance, the assessment process and schemes for marking and classification. In view of the current conflict situation, you will be invited to comment in particular on the mitigations and academic decision-making with regard to Dubai Campus provision, focusing especially on maintenance of quality and academic standards.
28. It is still the case that no University degree can be awarded without participation in the examining process by at least one External Examiner. Therefore, your engagement in the Award Board, or sending comments in advance, will be taken as evidence that you have been involved in the process of recommending awards and associated decisions.
29. Some Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) require assessments to be reviewed by External Examiners before being issued to students. Your academic and administrative contacts will be in touch with you in cases where redesigned Dubai assessments require your attention.

### **Reports from External Examiners**

30. The dates for return of External Examiner Reports remain as published: UG: 30 June 2026; PGT: 31 October 2026.
31. The standard External Examiner Report template will be largely the same, albeit with an additional section so that you can comment on how the Board and the School have responded in terms of mitigating the impact of the Middle East conflict.

### **Further Information**

32. The [Appointed External Examiners website](#) provides a wide range of information to support you in your role as External Examiner, including your School Primary Contact.

## Regulation A10: Authorities in Exceptional Circumstances

### Terminology in this Regulation

“Examiners” shall mean, “the Head of Primary Academic Unit (PAU) supported by the relevant External Examiner(s) carrying out their normal duties, a member of the teaching team representing each Programme of Study for which a decision is being made and, at the discretion of the Head of PAU, suitably qualified members of Staff of the University”.

This Regulation is made in pursuance of paragraphs 2 ii and iii of Statute 5 and Ordinances P1 and P7.

### 2. General

- 2.1. The purpose of this Regulation is to clarify authorities in exceptional circumstances.
- 2.2. ‘Exceptional circumstances’ shall be defined as those in which:
  - 2.2.1. the full range of information normally taken into account in academic decision making, is not available; and/or
  - 2.2.2. the circumstances have affected the ability to deliver the planned learning and teaching and/or assessment and requires immediate adjustments.
- 2.3. The Regulation shall not apply where the full range of information normally taken into account is available.
- 2.4. When the circumstances of paragraph 2.2 of this Regulation apply, it is the responsibility of the Senate Committee for Interim Business and Effectiveness (SCIBE), acting with the delegated authority of the Senate, to bring into effect the arrangements and conditions set out in this Regulation and to determine the duration for which they should be applied. When deciding to bring into effect the arrangements and conditions set out in this Regulation, it will be for the SCIBE to decide whether the circumstances of paragraph 2.2 apply.
- 2.5. A nominee appointed to act in place of a Head of a PAU shall be subject to approval by the SCIBE.
- 2.6. For a Student who is not enrolled with a particular PAU, the SCIBE will assign a Head of PAU.

### 3. Authorities

- 3.1. SCIBE, acting with the delegated authority of the Senate (after consulting with Heads of PAUs and relevant Provosts) shall authorise:
  - 3.1.1. Variations in admissions requirements, their arrangements and conditions, and the duration of those arrangements and conditions.
  - 3.1.2. The arrangements and conditions for the delivery of Programmes of Study, and the duration of those arrangements and conditions.
  - 3.1.3. The appropriate mitigations to be applied at Assessment, Progression and Awards Boards, and the duration of those mitigations.

### 4. Boards of Examiners

- 4.1. This paragraph 4 shall apply equally to assessments of any Course for progression and award of the University.
- 4.2. A Board of Examiners shall include the Examiners, as defined above, and the Dean or their nominee.
- 4.3. The Examiners are authorised to make judgements and decisions on the basis of such information as is available to them at the time a judgement or decision is required to be made.

4.4. The Examiners shall have the authority to:

4.4.1. make recommendations to the Senate for the award of degrees and other awards;

4.4.2. make decisions about progression;

4.4.3. award credit for individual courses; and

4.4.4. defer making a decision if it is agreed that there is insufficient information available to recommend awards or allow progression.

## **5. Appeals**

5.1. A candidate who is dissatisfied with the decision of the Examiners shall be entitled to appeal to under the terms of Regulation A12, Student Academic Appeals.